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A FREE TRANSLATION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

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Desirability of a translation of this great Sermon into modern phraseology—The Sermon characterized.—The Sermon analyzed.—The Sermon freely translated.

The following may be considered by some as more than a free translation. It is precisely this : an attempt to present the essential meaning of the Sermon on the Mount in such a way as to give it more of the vividness and impressiveness which it had for its first hearers,—qualities now lost in a measure by the familiarity of its terms. Such an attempt will permit much freedom in amplification, condensation and change of construction. Underlying and connecting thoughts will sometimes be supplied, and less usual terms occasionally displace those more accurate. As in painting, minuteness in detail depends on the distance of observation, so here the general impression sought may really be made most accurate by a somewhat free use of a vivid, popular phraseology. At all events, if it stimulate others to a renewed study of the text itself, and thus lead to deeper appreciation and more spiritual response, it will have conferred its chief benefit.

This great address of our Lord is predominantly spiritual rather than ethical. If we regard it simply as a series of moral precepts, we may classify these precepts, to be sure, in a more or less orderly way, but the unity will be at best superficial, if not in many cases artificial. Surface rocks and ledges, widely separated, often prove to be united underground ; so these precepts, many of them apparently unrelated, find their unity in an underlying spiritual idea. If Jesus had used a text for this sermon, I could almost fancy him choosing those penetrative, spiritual words spoken on another occasion : "The kingdom of God is within you."

The purpose of this article will be best subserved by analyzing the discourse and throwing it into modern form. The analysis is first presented in full and then repeated with the translation.

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Introduction : *Christians congratulated.*

1. Their qualities and privileges ideally expressed.

“Blessed are they whose poverty produces humility of spirit, for to them belongs the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn in penitence and submission, for they are the ones whom the Comforter shall comfort. Blessed are the gentle, unresisting spirits, for to them shall be fulfilled the Psalmist’s words: ‘They shall inherit the land.’ Blessed are they who long for the character which God approves, as a starving man craves food, for they are they whose longing shall be satisfied. Blessed are they who show tenderness to others, for they shall be tenderly treated themselves. Blessed are the pure, not with the washing of hands and the baptism of the body, but with the cleansing of the heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be recognized as sons of God, bearing God’s image. Blessed are they who have been persecuted for their conformity to God’s requirements, for theirs is a sphere of life far removed from that of their persecutors, an everlasting kingdom in which they are kings and priests unto God. Blessed are you, my disciples, whenever reviled, persecuted, and robbed of reputation for my sake; be glad, yea, sing for joy, for you are in fellowship with the holy prophets whose recompense is abundant on high.”

2. Aim and scope of their work indicated.

“You are the world’s salt, its only hope of preservation from moral corruption. Hold fast, then, your integrity, for if the salt lose its taste, retaining only the appearance of salt, how can you restore its saltiness? Such salt has no effect, and is fit only for rejection and contempt. You are the world’s light, nor can you escape your responsibility. A city built on a mountain crest cannot be hidden. You do not light a lamp in order to hide it, but place it upon a stand that it may light up the whole room. Thus freely let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your beautiful acts of goodness and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

I. *Relation of Christianity to the Jewish Religion.*

1. Continuity.

“Do not think, as some have done, that I came to abolish the law or the prophets. I came not to repeal but to fulfill by a

perfect obedience ; for I assure you, until the heaven you see above you and the earth you feel under your feet, pass away, not the dot of an "i" nor the cross of a "t" shall pass from the law until all are accomplished. If any man, then, shall disobey one of these smallest commands and teach others so, he shall be counted lowest in my kingdom ; but whosoever shall both render and teach obedience shall be counted great, for I assure you, unless your obedience to the will of God be more complete and spiritual than that of the scribes and pharisees, you shall never enter my kingdom."

2. Superiority.

a. In its regard for others' rights.—"You have heard as the command given to God's ancient people: 'Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be liable to prosecution.' But I tell you that anger against a brother man shall make you thus liable, and if you call him a rascal you shall be liable to prosecution before the supreme court, and if you call him a senseless reprobate you shall be liable to the worst punishment possible. The rights of your brother are so sacred that were you just offering a sacrifice you ought to stop and seek reconciliation with one whom you have wronged. If a creditor of yours is dragging you to court, acknowledge his right and your wrong. Make terms with him on the way, or else, when once he turns you over to the court, the law shall justly deal with you to the bitter end."

b. In its estimate of purity.—"You have heard the command: 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' But I tell you that every man who looks at a woman that he may feed his lustful desire, has already defiled her in his heart. If your eye cause you to sin, out with it ; if your hand, off with it. Better to lose one part than your whole being. Cast out, then, these false desires. It was further commanded: 'If any man put away his wife, let him give her a bill of divorcement.' But I tell you that marriage is inviolable, and if a man put away his wife for any cause but fornication, he is responsible for the adultery that is involved in her second marriage."

c. In its estimate of truthfulness.—"Again, you have heard

the command : 'Thou shalt not perjure thyself, but render unto the Lord thine oaths.' But I say unto you, do not swear at all, for every oath is really an appeal to God. Swear not by heaven, it is God's throne ; not by earth, it is his footstool ; not toward Jerusalem, it is his royal city ; nor even by your head, for you cannot change the color of a single hair. Let your speech be simple truth, yea for yea, nay for nay. More than this has its origin in the father of lies."

d. In its spirit of meekness.—"You know the familiar maxim of the law : 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, restrain your revenge yet more than this. Conquer by meekness. If any one hit you on one cheek, shame him by offering the other also. If a man will prosecute you to get your coat, give him your overcoat also. So in giving and lending, so in any matter. Rather than have a bitter, unbrotherly spirit, give up even your rights."

e. In its spirit of love.—"Ye have heard it, too, as God's law : 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.' But I tell you, love your worst enemies, and plead even for your persecutors, that you may become in spirit like your Heavenly Father, for he causes his sun to shine and his rain to fall on bad men as well as good. For if you love those who return your love, and are courteous to your friends only, what does that amount to ? The most irreligious people do as much as that. But you must be perfect in love, after the likeness of your Heavenly Father."

II. *Nature of Christianity.*

1. Spiritual, as opposed to external, nominal religion.

a. Stated.

"Be careful, lest, for the sake of winning their praise, you make a display of your religion before men, thus proving its falsity and losing all spiritual recompense."

b. Illustrated.

1) In the matter of alms.—"Whenever you give, do not make a parade about it as the hypocrites do, that they may be honored by men. I assure you they have their pay in full when men notice them. But in your giving let not even your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Let there be no self-

gratulation, that your gift may be in secret, bestowed for its own sake alone. Then shall He, who notes every secret act, your Father, honor it and bless you."

2) In the matter of prayer.—"Whenever you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites. Because they like to stand in the churches and public places to pray, that they may be seen by men. They have their full pay when men notice them. But whenever you pray, let it be a matter between your soul alone and God, an exercise suited for the chamber with door fast shut. So will the Author and Lover of reality hear and answer. And, in the act of prayer, do not mumble over cant repetitions like the heathen, who think that prayer is effective according to its length. Your Father knows all your needs before you pray. Let your prayer be brief, real. For example :

'Our Father, thou who art in the heavens,

May thy name be revered as holy,

May thy reign on earth be established,

May thy will be done on earth even as it is in heaven.

Give us to-day the food we need,

And forgive us our sins, even as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.

And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.'

Exercise, therefore, toward others that spirit of forgiveness which you desire your Heavenly Father to show toward you, and which will make it possible for you to receive the benefits of his love."

c. In the matter of fasts.—"And, whenever you fast, do not make a show of fasting as the hypocrites do, for they even cover their faces with dust and ashes, the ensignia of penitence, that they may seem holy to men. They get their full reward in the praise of men. But, whenever you fast, let your appearance be as usual, that your fast may not be noticeable to men. So shall the God of reality be pleased."

2. Sufficient.

a. Imperishable.—"Treasure not up for yourselves riches on earth, where moth and rust eat away and thieves break in and

steal. But lay up treasures in heaven, where there is no moth, no rust, no robber. For, where your treasures are, there will be your thought and desire."

b. Essential.—"The only source of light for the body is the eye. If, therefore, the vision be clear, the body has abundance of light; but if it be poor, to that extent must the body suffer darkness. Even so with the soul. Clear vision gives truth and light, corrupt vision gives moral darkness. Choose, then, between these two. No man can serve two masters. He must belong to one or the other. You cannot serve God and gain. But, having chosen God, be not anxious about the earthly treasures, food, clothes, houses. Man is greater than his environment. The God who made the greater can surely provide the less."

c. Involves all lesser good.—"Learn a lesson from the birds in yonder sky. They do not sow nor reap, and are cared for by their Creator. Is not a man worth far more in the eyes of his Maker than a bird? Anxiety accomplishes nothing. You cannot even add a span to your appointed life. And as for clothing, learn from the lilies, which toil not and spin not; yet Solomon in all his splendor was not so royally dressed. If God so clothes the grasses of a day, will he not much more clothe you? Be not troubled then, saying: 'What shall we eat, or drink, or wear?' for these are things the heathen seek for. Your Heavenly Father knows all your outward needs. Give your supreme attention, then, to his kingdom and his righteousness, and all necessary things shall be added. It is not worth the while to trouble about to-morrow, for thus you bear its burden twice."

III. *Application.*

Christianity demands:

1. *Charitableness.*—"Set not up yourselves to be judges of others, for if you judge others uncharitably, what judgment can you expect for yourselves? How also can you help your brother if you magnify his faults and minimize your own? Get the beam out of your own eye before you try to remove the splinter from your brother's eye."

2. *Wise use of holy things.*—"On the other hand, there are people toward whom severe judgment is all too lenient, who

treat religion as some would pearls. You would not take the shew-bread from its holy place and cast it out into the street for dogs to defile and devour. Neither ought you carelessly to subject the holy things of religion to the ridicule of such people. No good will be done, while you will suffer needless persecution."

3. Prayerfulness.—"Ask and it shall be given to you ; seek and you shall find ; knock and it shall be opened to you. For every one who asks, receives, and he who seeks, finds, and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. What man of you would give his child a stone when he asked for bread ? Or if he wanted fish, a snake ? If you, then, evil as you are, understand how to make good gifts to your little ones, how much more will your Heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him !"

4. Ethical perfection.—"Whatsoever, then, you wish to have others do unto you, do unto them, for this sums up the ethics of the whole Old Testament religion."

IV. *Closing Appeal.*

1. Invitation.—"Enter in through the narrow gate which calls for self-sacrifice and denial, because spacious is the road that leads away to destruction, and it is thronged with travelers ; but narrow is the gate and difficult is the road that leads away unto life, and few are the ones who find it."

2. Warning against false teachers.—"Beware of false teachers, who are lambs outwardly but in spirit are wolves. By their fruits you can tell them. Do grapes grow on thorn bushes or figs on thistles ? Even so a sound tree cannot produce poor fruit, nor an unsound tree fair fruit. Such teachers will reap bitter consequences. Every tree that produces bad fruit must feel the axe and the fire. Professions will not avail at the day of judgment. What though they say unto me : 'Master, Master, we were inspired teachers, and by thy name cast out demons, and did many mighty deeds.' Then I also will make my profession unto them : 'I never knew you at all. Away from me ! ye that work lawlessness.'"

3. Issues of obedience and disobedience.—"Every one, therefore, who hears my words and lives according to them, shall be likened to a far-sighted man who founded his house upon bed-

rock. And the tempest broke overhead, and the mountain torrents rose, and the storm-winds blew and fell upon that house, and could not overthrow it. But every one who hears these words of mine and obeys them not, shall be like a foolish man who founded his house upon the sand. And the tempest broke above it, and the mountain-torrents rose, and the storm-winds blew and pounded against that house, and it fell—and great, indeed, was its fall."